Jeffrey Epstein's Long Shadow

Author and speaker Mitzi Perdue is anti-trafficking advocate..

On Thursday, Queen Elizabeth stripped Britain's Prince Andrew of his royal titles, charity roles and military affiliations. It's a serious event that's happened only twice in the last hundred years: King Edward VIII lost his titles when he abdicated in 1936, and Princess Diana lost hers when she divorced Prince Charles in 1996.

In the case of Prince Andrew, Queen Elizabeth acted as a result of allegations that he sexually abused a teenager in the early 2000s. Andrew is accused in a pending civil case in New York, of sexual assault and sex trafficking of a minor, Virginia Roberts Giuffre, who was ensnared into the sex trafficking ring of Jeffrey Epstein.

Conchita Sarnoff, an investigative journalist, has been writing about Jeffrey Epstein and the people he ensnared since 2010, when she first tried to get her book *TrafficKing: The Jeffrey Epstein Case* published. A good part of what the world knows today about the Jeffrey Epstein case comes either directly from Sarnoff's writing or from others who benefited from her research. However, her book didn't see the light of day until recently.

Sarnoff's interest in the Epstein case began in a roundabout way. She was researching the business of sex trafficking before she had any idea of what Epstein was up to. While attending a dinner in Mexico City in 2006, the former Foreign Minister startled her with an accusation: "You Americans are a bunch of hypocrites," he told her. "You traffic weapons, illicit drugs and now you're stealing our children."

Sarnoff was aware of accusations that our government had facilitated the sale of guns in Mexico, but hearing that American were stealing children from another country and exploiting them for sex was new to her—and deeply disturbing.

Looking into the accusation on her return home to Washington, D.C,. she met with Deborah Sigmund, founder of the anti-trafficking organization Innocents at Risk. As a result she met a 12-year-old girl who had been trafficked.

Sarnoff had what she describes as a "charmed childhood" and had never been abused. Still, she says, she felt "an instant identification with this child." Until then, she recalls, she had been struggling to grasp how something so dark could actually be happening in the United States. Meeting the child made the issue real to her.

As a writer and researcher, Sarnoff embarked on writing a book to educate people about trafficking. Her "charmed background" played a large role in what happened next.

She's related to General David Sarnoff, founder of NBC, and her background gave her entrée into social circles of privilege. When Epstein's sex crimes became known, she had access to Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell. They had several friends in common.

"I had known Jeffrey Epstein since the early 1990s," Sarnoff told me, and she met Ghislaine Maxwell a few years later. After Epstein was arrested and imprisoned in 2008 in Palm Beach, Sarnoff did something that few others could. She telephoned Epstein, then interviewed him at his home while he was serving a prison sentence under house arrest.

From that conversation and other sources, Sarnoff learned that Epstein's crimes involved the rich, the powerful, the famous, and the royal. "The people implicated ranged from Harvard to the White House to Buckingham Palace," she told me.

Influence Peddling

"Because I had a social relationship with Epstein and Maxwell," says Sarnoff, "I knew who they were, who their friends were, and more or less how they thought. This allowed me to expand my investigation."

Sarnoff became convinced that the Epstein story wasn't only about child sexual exploitation. Sarnoff believes it was also about blackmail and influence peddling at the highest levels of power.

She finished her book in 2008, but dismayingly, 27 publishers turned her down. She was expecting that newspapers, as society's watchdog, would have been all over her insider-sourced story.

Instead, a curious pattern met her attempts to get the story out: A publisher would be excited by her book and eager to publish it. But then, inexplicably, the following day, the publisher would turn it down. Media outlets would book her and then, inexplicably, rescind the invitation.

Now the executive director of Alliance to Rescue Victims of Trafficking, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., Sarnoff isn't sure why her book repeatedly sparked enthusiasm but repeatedly wound up being rejected. She is left wondering whether Epstein, with his ability to blackmail the rich and powerful, was able to block her book from being published.

It did finally get published. *TraffickKing* became widely available in 2021. It's the story of how Sarnoff, despite bribes to stay silent, risked her life to expose the brutal reality of human trafficking and the Jeffrey Epstein, Ghislaine Maxwell ,and Prince Andrew stories.